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Sixty-eighth session

Official Records

6th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 24 September 2013, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Ashe ..... (Antigua and Barbuda)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Tommo Monthe (Cameroon), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.40 p.m.

Address by Ms. Laura Chinchilla Miranda, President of the Republic of Costa Rica

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Costa Rica.

Ms. Laura Chinchilla Miranda, President of the Republic of Costa Rica, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations Her Excellency Ms. Laura Chinchilla Miranda, President of the Republic of Costa Rica, and to invite her to address the Assembly.

President Chinchilla Miranda (*spoke in Spanish*): It is a pleasure to begin this address with warm congratulations to Ambassador John Ashe on his recent election as President of the General Assembly. We wish him success in his endeavours and assure him of our support.

Today is the last time that I will address the General Assembly as President of Costa Rica. As on previous occasions, my message is based upon my firm conviction of the essential nature of the United Nations to promote peace, security, development, democracy and human rights. The United Nations brings together, catalyses and protects the multilateral system and the international rule of law. Its validity, vigour, legitimacy and effectiveness are essential to all countries, but most importantly to the smaller and more vulnerable ones, especially if, like Costa Rica, they do not have armed forces. In the course of humankind's most challenging times throughout the past 68 years, we have turned to the Organization to seek guidance and solutions responsive to the hopes and longings of our peoples. Today, we are facing one such occasion, amid contradictions. We are the authors of great achievements, but we are also overwhelmed by acute tragedies. There remain serious global challenges for which we have not crafted responses that are equally global in scope.

On 2 April, we conclusively ratified the Arms Trade Treaty, a vital step that was proudly led by our country as one of the seven sponsoring countries, and a great victory for humankind. I am pleased to announce today that it has been unanimously ratified by the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica, and I pledge our support to work assidiously for its implementation.

Mr. Haniff (Malaysia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

In two days, for the first time in the history of the Organization, we will hold a high-level debate on nuclear disarmament. Costa Rica will also lend its leadership on the issue. In that way, we hope to be able to move closer towards an ideal aspired to by most countries and to make progress in new conceptual frameworks for discussion. The meetings of the Open-ended Working Group on Nuclear Disarmament, chaired

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with effectiveness by our Permanent Representative in Geneva, Mr. Manuel Dengo Benavides, have opened up a promising path.

We are working at a good rate to establish a new global agenda for sustainable development, as well as institutions to promote it. That is evidenced by the reform of the Economic and Social Council, the establishment of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the progress being made on the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals.

Increasingly, innovation, technology, education and culture are recognized as promoters of development, and there is a growing awareness of the need to actively incorporate young people in such endeavours. Together with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Costa Rica is honoured to have hosted and organized BYND 2015 Global Youth Summit, an international conference on youth, development and information and communication technologies. The conference brought together young people from various parts of the world and enjoyed the able leadership from the ITU Secretary General, Mr. Hamadoun Touré. Today, I symbolically present to the General Assembly the final declaration of the conference, adopted in our capital on 11 September by thousands of young people from every continent. We trust that it will be a very relevant input for the discussion of the post-2015 development agenda.

To explore options for the future, in March Costa Rica also hosted an international conference of middle-income countries jointly organized with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization. Its results will help to better conceptualize the needs of nations like ours and the contributions that we can make in terms of the post-2015 development agenda.

As part of those initiatives, we must not overlook our duty to strive to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and the need to accelerate their implementation, particularly in less developed countries.

The achievements I have mentioned, as well as others, have taken place under the ominous and tragic shadow of a world that remains very complicated. We are still shocked by the brutal terrorist attack committed a few days ago in Nairobi. Today I express our deepest solidarity with the people of Kenya and our strongest condemnation of that attack, and of terrorism and fanaticism.

For the past two years, we have been struck by the tragedy in Syria. The incessant count of massacred and displaced persons has been as unsettling as the inaction of the international community, particularly the Security Council, to act in a timely way to contain the crimes and the violence. After a period of paralysis and confusion, it seems that at last we are approaching a solution that will lead to breaking out of that unacceptable stalemate. We raise our voice to demand that the Security Council act decisively to eliminate chemical weapons in Syria, halt the violence, seek a negotiated and democratic way out of the conflict and hold accountable those responsible for the horrible crimes committed in that country.

Costa Rica insists that the Security Council should refer the Syrian case to the International Criminal Court. We also call again on the five permanent members of the Council to henceforth commit themselves to refraining from exercising the veto in cases of crimes against humanity.

The Syrian tragedy underscores the need to work decisively towards the organic application of the responsibility to protect and to promote the use of mediation to avoid the emergence or the worsening of conflicts. As a concrete measure towards such prevention, we urge all Member States to join the initiative of Australia, Costa Rica, Denmark and Ghana and designate national focal points for the prevention of atrocities and on the responsibility to protect. The preventive approach is also necessary to manage universal public goods and, consequently, to exert global governance.

The prevention and reversal of global warming is one of the most urgent issues on our crucial agenda. We cannot remain inactive while global warming increases, ocean levels rise and the survival of several small island States is threatened. We commend the Secretary-General's plan to convene a summit on climate change and his promotion of the initiative entitled "The Oceans Compact: Healthy Oceans for Prosperity". We believe that the time has come to negotiate, pursuant to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Oceans, an international agreement on that subject.

Besides being an instrument for global governance and the protection of universal public goods, international law entails many other dimensions. Those include respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States, goodwill in addressing border issues

and observance of all the decisions of the International Court of Justice. Costa Rica is a firm believer in and scrupulous observer of international law in all its aspects. But that attitude contrasts with the absolute disrespect of the Government of Nicaragua of the most elementary norms of conduct and coexistence among States. That disrespect has led to open and unacceptable aggression against our country and to the flagrant disobedience of the orders of the Court at The Hague.

In October of 2010, Nicaraguan forces occupied part of Costa Rica's territory. Following our complaint, the International Court of Justice issued provisional measures that, among other things, prohibit the presence of Nicaraguan personnel in the zone under dispute. But Nicaragua has continued sending contingents of political activists, funded and organized by its Government. In August 2013, the Court reiterated its demand for compliance with the provisional measures, but Nicaragua has again ignored them. Their scorn demonstrates the urgent need to establish procedures that guarantee the respect of all decisions emanating from the Court, including precautionary measures. Costa Rica commits itself to work towards that goal and expects an open stance from the international community.

The Nicaraguan Government, moreover, has offered blocks of the patrimonial sea of Costa Rica for exploration and exploitation of oil. It seeks to extend the limits of its continental shelf by ignoring our rights and has broken off negotiations to secure maritime boundaries. It has threatened to claim a province of Costa Rica as its own and has restarted dredging works in the zone subject to the provisional measures of the International Court of Justice. Furthermore, it is pursuing a policy of increased re-armament.

The Nicaraguan and Costa Rican people wish and deserve to live in peace, but the Nicaraguan Government insists on preventing that. By pursuing a course of such deliberate and repeated misconduct, the Government of Nicaragua undermines international law and the very purpose of the United Nations.

Notwithstanding the gravity of the situation, Costa Rica remains peacefully and firmly committed to the well-being and security of our population. We promote a model of development based upon harmony with nature, solidarity and social inclusion, an open economy and open trade, the development of our human resources, and innovation. We realize that development is futile if it is not founded on a profound respect for human dignity and the rights and well-being of the people.

We firmly believe that respect for and promotion of human rights in all its dimensions is a national and international duty. For that reason, among others, we remain open to all special procedures on human rights, and we are engaged actively and constructively in the Human Rights Council.

In facing the challenges of public safety, including drug trafficking and transnational organized crime, our country has adopted a balanced strategy whose positive results are evident in many areas, including the continued reduction in our homicide rate over the past three years, one of the lowest in Central America. Given the gravity for many nations of the challenges of drug trafficking and transnational organized crime, we join the call by other States from our region, such as Mexico and Guatemala, to re-evaluate agreed international policies and to seek more effective responses against drug trafficking, from a perspective of health, respect for human rights and impact reduction. Along the same lines, it is necessary to increase international cooperation to reduce the illegal flows of weapons and money that fuel criminal networks.

The new global strategy on that enormous challenge should be the product of the open and inclusive debate during the extraordinary session of the General Assembly in 2016. We salute the Antigua Declaration of the General Assembly of the Organization of American States as a first step to leading us in the right direction towards that special session.

Against the backdrop of the actions and convictions I have just outlined, we respond enthusiastically to the call of the President of the General Assembly to advance in framing the post-2015 development agenda during this session. We are encouraged by his emphasis on more active involvement by civil society in that process, the importance assigned to human rights and the rule of law as bases for development, and his openness to new ideas and institutional modalities, including alliances among multiple sectors.

Costa Rica looks to the future with confidence. At the same time, we are aware of the risks and challenges that we face as a country, as a region and as part of humankind. In that future, we see the United Nations as an indispensable institution, a steadfast companion, a visionary guide and co-guardian of our tranquility and well-being. I pay tribute to its contributions and

sincerely hope that they may multiply in the years to come.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Costa Rica for the statement she has just made.

Ms. Laura Chinchilla Miranda, President of the Republic Costa Rica, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Heinz Fischer, Federal President of the Republic of Austria

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Federal President of the Republic of Austria.

Mr. Heinz Fischer, Federal President of the Republic of Austria, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Heinz Fischer, Federal President of the Republic of Austria, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Fischer: I thank the President for raising for discussion at this year's general debate a very pertinent subject, namely, "The post-2015 development agenda: setting the stage". Shaping our planet's future after 2015 is indeed a crucial task ahead of us, as Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon described very impressively in his presentation this morning (see A/68/PV.5). While we remain fully committed to the full implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, the post-2015 agenda has started.

One idea that has caught my particular attention is to upgrade the eradication of hunger from an indictor to a goal in that new agenda. More still needs to be done, and everyone must contribute a fair share: States, international organizations, the private sector, academia and civil society alike. Let me assure the Assembly that Austria will contribute its share as well.

The international community currently faces major threats in its search for global security. The Middle East remains exposed to fundamental challenges. We welcome the agreement reached between the United States and the Russian Federation on a framework for the destruction of the Syrian chemical weapons arsenal. We believe that the Security Council should refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. Accountability is, and remains, necessary to stopping the atrocities and prevent future crimes.

The path to democratic participation and a new beginning in Syria — the actual goal of the civilian protests that started two and a half years ago — remains crucial. Unfortunately, the parties seem to be firmly set on a military solution to the conflict. However, it should be clear that the best way to achieve a sustainable solution can only be a political, negotiated one. That is the Austrian position.

By now the civil war in Syria is greatly affecting all neighbouring countries. The conflict is a Syrian one, but the consequences go far beyond its borders. It has indeed become international.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict seems to have been overshadowed by the upheavals in the region. I have followed events there for almost 40 years. I am convinced that what is needed for a solution is the willingness not only to negotiate in good faith but also to take into account the needs and sensibilities of the negotiating partner: the other side. I, for one, cannot believe that the value of the new settlements to Israel outweighs the damage they cause by being an obstacle to peace and reasonable conditions.

We welcome that the new United States Administration has devoted its full attention to that long-standing question and that direct negotiations resumed at the end of July. What we need now is decisive leadership. We are convinced that a breakthrough in the central conflict would also mean a decisive step towards stabilization of the entire region.

While we continue to support the ongoing transition processes in the Arab world, recent developments in the region have cast a shadow on the democratic gains achieved so far. Progress on the difficult path to democracy will greatly depend upon whether all parts of society are included.

Vienna and its United Nations headquarters serve as a platform for the discussion on sustainable development. Austria is very pleased that the Office of the Special Representative for the Sustainable Energy for All initiative in Vienna started its activities on 1 July. We welcome the initiative's cooperation with thematic and regional hubs, as well as with other specialized organizations like the United Nations Industrial Development Organization.

Austria is also the host country of the newly established International Anti-Corruption Academy. This international organization and centre of excellence has already undertaken several successful activities in fighting corruption — a major obstacle to reasonable development in all areas of society. I thank the Kingdom of Thailand for hosting the second Assembly of Parties, scheduled to take place in December. Furthermore, I would like to invite all States that have not yet done so to become members of the Anti-Corruption Academy.

This year's Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations took place in Vienna in February, with the forward-looking theme of "Responsible leadership in diversity and dialogue". More than 1,500 participants from government, civil society, the private sector and the media, as well as a youth forum of 150 outstanding and highly dedicated participants, provided most valuable input for the discussions of the Forum.

In that context, I am also pleased to report that the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue was inaugurated in Vienna on 26 November 2012. The Centre — a joint initiative of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom of Spain and the Republic of Austria — serves as an interactive platform for religious leaders, experts and civil society alike.

Multilateral cooperation can deliver solutions to global problems. The historic accomplishment of the Arms Trade Treaty is an important example in that regard. We look forward to its earliest possible entry into force. At the same time, the international disarmament and non-proliferation regime is being challenged, day after day, by alarming developments. We were, and still are, deeply shocked by the use of chemical weapons in Syria. We observe North Korea's continued development of nuclear weapons and missile capabilities with concern. And we have new hope that the Iranian nuclear issue will be resolved by negotiations, which, after the election of a new Iranian President, should be resumed shortly.

Similarly, the continued reliance on nuclear weapons and the limited progress towards nuclear disarmament are of great global concern. Nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation efforts can be achieved only when they go forward together. Nuclear weapons should be stigmatized, banned and eliminated. The humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons have to be put at the centre of our attention.

While some might believe that there is a contradiction between respect for cultural and religious differences on the one hand and the universality of human rights on the other, I am convinced that they reinforce each other. If people and nations can count on human rights being protected, they will show respect for the other side.

The Human Rights Council, with its universal periodic review mechanism and special procedures, has, within a few years, developed into an effective instrument to address human rights violations and crisis situations in many instances. Austria, as a current member of the Council, is contributing to those efforts with targeted initiatives for the safety of journalists, the protection of religious minorities and the promotion of the rights of the child.

We welcome the continuing trend towards the universal abolition of the death penalty, which is a longstanding interest of mine. However, too many countries still maintain a retentionist policy with regard to that cruel and inhuman form of punishment. Our diplomatic efforts therefore have to be reinforced.

We are worried by the increasing number of human rights violations based on sexual orientation or gender identity. The 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna and the 2005 World Summit firmly placed human rights at the centre of United Nations activities. Respect for human rights is an indispensable prerequisite for peace, security and development.

Last year, the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Rule of Law provided an excellent opportunity for us to renew our commitment to the rule of law at the national and international levels. The Austrian Government is considering setting up an Austrian rule-of-law trust fund, designed to support international actors in strengthening the rule of law and to offer legal expertise and deploy legal experts free of charge to developing countries, at their request. International law and the rule of law are the foundations of the international system. Austria strongly believes that only an international system based on the rule of law can lead to lasting peace, security, economic development and social progress. Obviously, that is particularly true for the use of force, which should occur only in self-defence or when authorized by the Security Council.

In that spirit, let me confirm that Austria remains fully committed to an effective United Nations system.

In that connection, I especially want to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his tireless efforts and his commitment to peace, the rule of law and human rights.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Federal President of the Republic of Austria for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Heinz Fischer, Federal President of the Republic of Austria, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Horacio Manuel Cartes Jara, President of the Republic of Paraguay

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Paraguay.

Mr. Horacio Manuel Cartes Jara, President of the Republic of Paraguay, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Horacio Manuel Cartes Jara, President of the Republic of Paraguay, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Cartes Jara (*spoke in Spanish*): As President of the Republic of Paraguay, I have the great honour to speak in this global forum to address issues that are relevant to my country and to today's world in general.

I extend a special greeting to the President of the Assembly, Ambassador John Ashe, as well as to the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, in appreciation of their work towards the noble goals that unite us. Through their efforts, they contribute to the legitimacy of the United Nations and help to ensure multilateral cooperation and the international validity of the rule of law.

It has been little more than a month since I took office as President of the Republic of Paraguay, after an exemplary electoral process that culminated on 21 April, when the Paraguayan people went to the polls to freely exercise their guaranteed constitutional right to elect their Government, with irrefutable results. Electoral observer missions from various regional and continental organizations, and from the United Nations itself, were present and certified the legality, legitimacy and transparency of the elections and the electoral process, whereby the will of the people honoured me with the highest office of our Republic. Those events also represent the conclusion of a long transition towards democracy in Paraguay. For the second, time in our history, executive authority was consecutively transferred from one political party to another with full respect for the constitutional framework. That is no small achievement in our 202 years of independence, and it signals the true beginning of a new historic and auspicious period for my country.

Republican institutionalism, the building of consensus, the strengthening of the democratic system, unconditional respect for human rights, and freedom of speech and of the press are the cornerstones of my Government, which aims to be an exemplar of patriotism, honesty, inclusion and effectiveness, with the capacity needed to propel Paraguay towards its destined greatness.

The people of Paraguay have been waiting for a great Government for a long time. I hope to be able to deliver on that great vision, which will position my country firmly on the global stage, where we want to stand out by ensuring that we are a land of opportunity for Paraguayans and foreigners alike. As has been said, Paraguay is one of the most closely guarded treasures of Latin America, and there are good reasons to hope that it will have a promising future.

I have made combating poverty a priority for my Government. It is incomprehensible that a nation so rich in resources should have so many poor. We will give no quarter in the fight to reduce our poverty indicators as much and as quickly as possible. Change is coming, and not through aid but by ensuring human dignity. Social investment is at the forefront of my Administration's agenda. That is the new direction we want to take in my country, with investment that is for the people, so that they may live in dignity and become the engine of our development, and, better still, so that the general welfare of the people can become the firm basis of our democracy.

My Government has also committed to a policy of zero tolerance for corruption and an end to impunity. We expect to face that challenge with the firm support of the judiciary and the Office of the Attorney General.

Paraguay's economy has enviable numbers. We are the only country in the region that has not altered its currency, the guaraní, since it was first introduced in 1943. Our macroeconomic indicators are more than

encouraging. Paraguay is clearly suited to investment. Nature has endowed my country with an enviable climate, more than 90 rivers, abundant and fertile soil and clean, renewable energy generated by three hydroelectric power plants. One, Acaray, is entirely Paraguayan-owned, while Itaipu and Yacyretá are co-owned with Brazil and Argentina, respectively. The latter are among the largest hydroelectric plants in the world. We have one of the world's largest freshwater reserves, the Guaraní Aquifer, a great part of which lies beneath Paraguayan territory.

Apart from the advantages of nature and abundant, clean and renewable energy, the majority of Paraguay's population is young, with more than 75 per cent under the age of 30. Our tax system is favourable to investment and our economic growth clearly exceeds the average for the region. My Government is committed to ensuring legal security, with clear and transparent rules for safeguarding people and their property.

Today we are a country with a revitalized economy and a focus on efficiency, transparency and a reliable public administration. A few weeks ago I was present in our Congress at the signing of an agreement for Paraguay, whereby the political parties represented in the legislature, along with other social institutions, committed to working together on framework agreements and plans of action to strengthen governance and attain material and spiritual goals for the people's welfare. In that way, we are seeking to maintain the general good over that of the individual. We do that through dialogue, which is the main instrument of democracy. Together, we assume the responsibility of making Paraguay a country of opportunity for all.

After visiting countries in Europe and the Americas recently, I reflect on the great challenge posed by the perception of my country beyond its borders. I have seen with satisfaction the respect, admiration and interest that Paraguay and its enormous potential give rise to. Just as it is our responsibility as Paraguayans to build predictability and reliability, it is for the branches of the Government to provide the legal security necessary for Paraguay's overdue progress.

I would like to underline my Government's commitment to the defence and promotion of human rights, which in Paraguay are fully acknowledged in the Constitution. We assume that stance out of genuine conviction, while my country is also a respectful signatory of recognized international instruments in that field.

The demands of landlocked developing countries like Paraguay must be adequately addressed. Apart from that, my Government is committed to overcome the disadvantages posed by our inland status, making our geographic position an advantage in communications, logistics and infrastructure that connects the world's zones and regions through Paraguayan territory. In a manner similar to that in which an old border dispute between Paraguay and Brazil finally gave way to what today is Itaipu, transforming a problem into a majestic work of integration and development, we hope that our landlocked position in the heart of Latin America will serve as a development hub for Paraguay and its neighbours.

On the international level, I cannot avoid mentioning the upheavals that disturb our times. Economic crises, financial disasters, civil wars and the use of weapons of mass destruction cloud the horizons of great regions of the planet.

The events in Syria are a concern for all of us, and the United Nations must play a pre-eminent role in finding a definitive solution to the conflict affecting that country. In that regard, my country calls for supporting the implementation of the framework agreement between the United States and the Russian Federation.

My Government has observed with satisfaction that the Republic of China on Taiwan has achieved a greater presence in the specialized agencies and bodies of the United Nations, thanks to solid international support and a rapprochement between both parties on the Taiwan Strait. My Government will continue to encourage the positive interaction between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait in the international sphere.

The calm and determination of the nations and the organizations able to help in conflict resolution are more necessary than ever. Paraguay encourages peace, dialogue and development in harmony with the other countries and the world, promoting an integration that is respectful of the rule of law, the dignity of nations and the asymmetries. Integration is a phenomenon that in this global era cannot be halted. Paraguay understands and promotes integration in conditions of equality as a means for supranational insertion, but under fair conditions and looking towards a common future, not as a simple courting of Powers or being a silent guest

in global forums that are discussing the future of our peoples.

Paraguay's contribution is essential in today's integrated reality and is indissolublely linked to our dignity as a free nation, sovereign and independent, under the premise of the right to the self-determination of peoples and the principles of non-intervention and the legal equality of States. The true destiny of the people of Paraguay is to become a prosperous nation, living in social peace, liberty, justice and equality. My management of the Government is geared towards creating and strengthening an environment suited to the unlimited opportunities that my country offers for all Paraguayans and for foreigners who have chosen it. I have realized that my people neither want nor seek handouts, but opportunities to achieve dignity through work and study. My country therefore today presents itself to the world as a land of opportunities for investment and prosperity, with security, formality, reliability and predictability.

On this occasion, I cannot fail to mention a key issue — education. Traditional political discourse has significantly undermined certain core ideas that my Government intends to definitively turn into a reality. Much has been said about the need for education, security and health, but little has been done in that regard. Improving education in Paraguay, in terms of quantity and quality, is a fundamental premise of my Government.

Today more than ever before, the great change that must take place in Paraguay and the opening of a wide window of opportunity depend on an efficient and inclusive educational system. Institutions of public education should rethink their role in society and assume an unprecedented role as a breeding ground for leaders for a new Paraguay, with a skilled workforce adapted to this millennium, in an interconnected world where those who possess more knowledge, information and abilities are more likely to find more and better opportunities for work, well-being and personal advancement. Those countries that emphasized education from the beginning are proud of their results. There is a clear and direct relationship between education and development.

Education is therefore key. The issue is rooted in the quality of training and is the key to escaping geopolitical shakles, backwardness and a lack of opportunities. For my country, the new rules that govern the world therefore represent an access to the ocean of development.

Speaking before the Assembly and the world for the first time as President of the Republic of Paraguay, I present the new direction that the Paraguayan people freely and sovereignly chose on 21 April. I belong to a nation whose children have contributed to history with their prowess and boundless sacrifice, such as the supreme sacrifice by our greatest hero, Francisco Solano López, Field Marshal and President of the Republic, who decided to give his life, sword in hand, fighting on the front lines with his last soldiers, rather than see his homeland humiliated. I have decided to devote myself to the service of Paraguay and to bring about the real change that my country demands, which is to return to the path of the true Paraguayan destiny of peace, development and modernity, and to grow in harmony with all nations of the world, particularly with our neighbours.

I assure the General Assembly that my country is a very generous and attractive place. I invite the world to learn more about Paraguay, to discover the treasure that pulses in the heart of America, ready to write anew the most glorious pages in its history, today in peace and social and economic development, with dignity and readiness to welcome all those who wish to share in our great destiny.

We Heads of State are transients in Government. History will judge us for what we have done for our peoples and will sternly hold us accountable for what we have failed to do. To honour the trust and hope of my people, I have decided to commit myself wholly to the service of my homeland and to do everything necessary for its greatness and prosperity.

Paraguay considers it necessary, more than ever before, to give greater impetus to the negotiating process between Israel and Palestine in order to attain a lasting peace, so that Israel and Palestine can live side by side with secure borders and in peace.

As a final comment, I wish to convey my most sincere condolences to the people of Kenya for the casualties that resulted from the terrorist attack, an act that we most vigorously condemn.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Paraguay for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Horacio Manuel Cartes Jara, President of the Republic of Paraguay, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Andris Bērziņš, President of the Republic of Latvia

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Latvia.

Mr. Andris Bērziņš, President of the Republic of Latvia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Andris Bērziņš, President of the Republic of Latvia, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Bērziņš: The three pillars of the United Nations — peace and security, sustainable development, and human rights — are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. Respect for universal human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law is a cornerstone of international peace and stability.

Fragile, conflict-affected and least developed countries face the biggest difficulties in ensuring sustainable development. Growing evidence shows that progress on the Millenium Development Goals in those States is impossible without first achieving peace and security. That leads us to one of the cornerstones of the new post-2015 vision: peace and security are basic conditions for a decent life and for the enjoyment of human rights.

The priorities of the Assembly's sixty-eighth session are topical and very pertinent. The new development framework for post-2015 will remain high on the United Nations agenda for the next two years and beyond. It should set out a comprehensive and coherent framework around a single set of global goals, driving action in all countries. A set of peacebuilding goals should be high on the post-2015 agenda, in which the United Nations should continue to play the leading role in promoting the settlement of disputes by peaceful means.

The Middle East stands at a crossroads. Events there have global impact, and the international community must take decisive actions.

We deplore the continuing humanitarian catastrophe in Syria. The easing of human suffering is the immediate goal, and we commend international efforts to that end. I would especially like to thank the neighbouring countries for hosting Syrian refugees. The detailed report by the United Nations inspectors confirms the use of chemical weapons against civilians on 21 August. Those who committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in Syria must face the International Criminal Court. The agreement reached by the United States and Russia on the framework to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons should be reflected in a Security Council resolution with the clear indication that Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations would be invoked in case of non-compliance.

We encourage the new Iranian leadership to address the concerns of the international community. We welcome the stated determination of the new Iranian Government to resolve the nuclear issue, thus building confidence in the peaceful nature of its nuclear programme.

Latvia welcomes the reopening of direct Middle East peace negotiations. Latvia praises the role of the United States as the mediator. Negotiations should demonstrate the commitment of both parties to a peaceful settlement. We anticipate a two-State solution — Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security.

Latvia is convinced that the resolution of protracted conflicts in Moldova, Georgia and Nagorno Karabakh should remain high on the international agenda. Efforts to resolve the conflicts should be increased.

Latvia accumulated extensive experience during its transition to a free, just and democratic society. As a European Union member State with that extensive experience, we share it with countries in the European Union's Eastern Partnership and Central Asia. Latvia will continue to offer its expertise in such areas as the rule of law and fundamental freedoms, thereby contributing to good governance and further economic development in those countries. However, it is essential to keep in mind that national ownership is fundamental in any reform process.

Latvia is stepping up development assistance for Afghanistan and the Central Asian States, particularly in the areas of transportation and customs. We see potential for the further integration of those countries into the global economy by developing international

trade routes. The Northern Distribution Network already connects the region with Europe through Latvia. We are confident that it can also become a commercially viable long-term transit corridor after 2014.

We are approaching an important turning point in Afghanistan. In order to secure the progress achieved, the international community must remain committed to the country's long-term development. Latvia will continue to support civilian policing and to train military personnel. We will also provide financial aid to the Afghan National Security Forces as of 2015.

Sustainable development and prosperity go hand in hand. During times of recession, structural reforms and budgetary discipline, accompanied by economic stimulus, bring results. While we can observe signs of global economic recovery, there is no room for complacency.

To ensure robust economic growth, we need to ensure that the young generation contributes to it. Quality education is the key to empowering people; it should reach all. Everybody should have lifelong learning opportunities. Quality education is the foundation on which peaceful, prosperous and dignified societies are built.

Following the economic downturn in 2008, Latvia has been the fastest growing European Union economy for the past two years. We expect to maintain that strong growth trend at the level of at least 4 per cent annually for the coming years. Latvia is now ready for further integration into the global economy by introducing the euro in 2014 and by joining the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

An empowered civil society is a key engine of sustainable development. We are proud that the people of Latvia are actively engaged in the decision-making process at all stages. In the twenty-first century the public involvement's must be ensured both directly and on line. Latvia has been working actively to protect and promote Internet freedom as an important element of freedom of expression for an open and democratic society.

Latvia stands ready to contribute to the most fundamental goals that should figure on the post-2015 agenda, namely, promoting peace, human rights and fundamental freedoms. Therefore, we have put forward our candidacy for the elections to the Human Rights Council in 2014 and the Security Council in 2025. Latvia counts on the support of Member States and gives its assurance that it will contribute to the work of those bodies in a responsible manner.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Latvia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Andris Bērziņš, President of the Republic of Latvia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Liberia.

Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations Her Excellency Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia, and to invite her to address the Assembly.

President Johnson-Sirleaf: I am honoured to address the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session on behalf of the Government and people of Liberia and to extend my warmest congratulations to the President and to the Government of Antigua and Barbuda on the occasion of his election as President of the Assembly at this session. I trust that he will bring his wealth of experience to bear on the work of the current session. In a similar vein, I congratulate his predecessor, Mr. Vuk Jeremić of the Republic of Serbia, for his leadership of the Assembly at the sixty-seventh session and for the initiatives he undertook during his tenure.

Let me also extend my special appreciation to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his inspiring leadership and his visionary initiatives that have mobilized the international community around many noble objectives. Those initiatives have engendered hope among the people around the world, especially the poor and marginalized.

We are deeply concerned about the growing number of acts of senseless violence around the world, as exemplified by the ghastly and cowardly murder of innocent persons in a terrorist attack on a shopping

mall in Kenya. We commiserate with the families of all victims and with the Government and sisterly people of Kenya on such a terrible loss.

Because we know first-hand the profound destruction and long-lasting hurt inherent in civil conflict, we also agonize with the people of Syria, particularly those innocent women and children who suffer most from such tragedy. We unequivocally condemn the use of chemical weapons in Syria and anywhere else in the world, and we call for concerted and renewed international effort to stem the rising scourge of terrorism and other transnational crimes through action to control and eliminate weapons of mass destruction.

We welcome the communications revolution that has provided a broad cyber platform for the exchange of information. However, that should not provide a vehicle for the promotion of terrorism and the spread of unfounded and irresponsible information through unregulated cyber weaponry that threatens the security of nations, particularly fragile States, and open societies of freedom and democracy.

Colleague after colleague who will address the Assembly will no doubt express pride at the tremendous progress in Africa. Our continental growth has averaged over 5 percent annually, surpassing that of other regions. Moreover, our economies are diversifying, our trade infrastructure is expanding, our democracies are strong and maturing, and our regional institutions strengthening and leading the processes of cooperation and integration. But the new Africa story is not just about growth. We see improvement in school enrolment, health indicators, in trade and investment. The share of people living in poverty is declining. Democracy, while still needing room for improvement, has become the norm rather than the exception, and governance has improved significantly over the past decade.

We are equally pleased with the progress made in resolving conflicts in several of our countries, as we welcome the international support that has set Somalia on a trajectory of peace and development.

We appreciate the strong collaboration among regional economic communities, the African Union and the United Nations, joined by the international community, that responded robustly in the Malian crisis, thereby averting the threat posed to the peace and security of the entire region. The recent inauguration of a new, democratically elected President in Mali is a clear indication that such cooperation is the surest path to world peace. We congratulate the newly elected President of Mali, Mr. Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, for receiving the overwhelming endorsement of the Malian people, and we commend all stakeholders for respecting the outcome of the democratic process. We also salute the former interim President, Mr. Dioncounda Traoré, and all partners for working to restore constitutional order within the stipulated time period.

Although Liberia still faces the residual challenges of its own conflict, and despite our size and limited military strength, I am pleased to report that a small contingent of Liberian troops is currently participating in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali. We view our role in that peacekeeping effort as a way of reciprocating, albeit in a small way, the countless demonstrations of friendship and goodwill that were accorded to us by Mali and other members of the international community during our dark days of war.

Once the epicentre of a regional war, I am pleased to note that the neighboring countries of the Mano River Union — Côte D'Ivoire, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia — are at peace and engaged in consolidating the gains of stability to accelerate national transformation through regional integration. A new Mano River Union initiative will facilitate connectivity in our power and transport systems, thereby enhancing cross-border trade, in which our market women are actively engaged.

I bring greetings from the Government and people of Liberia, who are this year celebrating 10 consecutive years of peace and progress. In those 10 years, our nation's pride has been restored and we have returned to the community of nations as a respectable and responsible partner. With the support of the international community, especially the United Nations through its peacebuilding and peacekeeping efforts, we have rebuilt a new ethnically balanced professional army and increased the size and enhanced the professionalism of our police, immigration and intelligence forces, in line with our commitment to bear full responsibility for security with in our borders as United Nations peacekeepers execute a phased drawdown.

In that regard, we commend the Security Council for its recent adoption of resolution 2116 (2013), which extends the mandate of the United Nations peacekeeping Mission in Liberia to 30 September 2014. We fully commit to meeting all the expectations of the

resolution, including continuing to take concrete steps aimed at developing and sustaining a self-sufficient and competent security sector able to tackle violent crimes, sexual and gender-based violence and the infringement of the rights of the ordinary person.

Thanks to our commitment and the resilience of the Liberian people, we have instituted a host of reforms intended to improve governance, enhance accountability and create an enabling environment for the exercise of basic freedoms, including freedom of speech and the press. That has put the country on a path of irreversible progress, which has enabled us to conduct two democratic presidential and general elections and adjust our Vision 2030, while laying a firm foundation for the transformation of our economy towards moving our country to middle-income status by the year 2030.

Liberia has come a long way, but we know that we have an even longer way to go. We have done much in restoring basic services and infrastructure, but still have much to do, especially in reducing our huge infrastructure deficits in power and in transport. We have done much in improving governance and strengthening our institutions of integrity, but still have much more to do in consolidating the culture of integrity and accountability in a society that is still beset by values occasioned by years of conflict. We have adopted laws and policies that eschew discrimination of any kind, to ensure social equity and equal opportunity, but still must do more in promoting natural reconciliation and healing. We have done much in achieving an average annual growth of over 7 per cent and attracted huge multi-million-dollar direct foreign investments, especially in our natural resource sector, but still have much more to do in expanding growth and diversifying our economy, making it more resilient to internal and external shocks and more responsive to the ever-increasing demand of our people for jobs and improved livelihoods. We still have much to do in continuing the reforms that will ensure equitable benefits from natural resource capital to current and future generations.

All the policies and actions that we have pursued in the past several years have enabled us to stabilize our overall national condition. We must now, over the next few years, take the hard decisions in addressing long-standing structural systems. We know that the transition from stabilization to transformation can be a long and hard road subject to brickbats from vested interests. We are bound to face criticism as we attempt to apply and respect the rule of law and as we challenge entrenched social habits, but we must change old mindsets and attitudes. We remain strong in that resolve, for it is the right thing to do.

I was honoured to have been selected by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon as one of three co-Chairs of a 27-member High-level Panel of Eminent Persons tasked with making recommendations for a new global development agenda post-2015. The mandate of the Panel was to advise the Secretary-General on a bold and practical development agenda beyond 2015 that builds upon, as well as goes beyond, the Millennium Development Goals in establishing new goals that are ambitious and yet achievable. Last May, the Panel submitted its report to the Secretary-General for his consideration. We are pleased that many of the principles we identified are emphasized in the Secretary General's report (A/68/202), rightly titled "A life of dignity for all".

Today more than at any other time, we have an opportunity to transform our world; to pursue an agenda that will eradicate poverty while at the same time sustaining nature to secure natural resources for future generations. The solutions of yesterday may not apply today's challenges, so we must muster the courage to take bold steps. I therefore call upon the Assembly to reflect on the emerging challenges we face, to boldly seize new opportunities and to commit ourselves to a new global partnership that promotes economic and social transformations for inclusive and shared prosperity for all.

In Africa we are working towards a continental consensus that will convey an African position on the post-2015 development agenda. I am pleased to have been asked by the African Union Summit to chair a high-level committee of 10 Heads of State that will oversee and guide the process. We held our first meeting yesterday here in New York, and agreed upon a road map that will ensure a global development framework that is not only brave and ambitious, but one that reflects African priorities, a global agenda that creates an enabling environment for Africa's transformation that includes infrastructure development, increased productive capacities, resilience to external shocks and enhanced statistical capacities that will result will accelerate the reation of employment that is directed particularly to our youthful populations.

I am pleased to report that on 2 September, I chaired and launched the High-level Panel on Fragile

States, under the aegis of the African Development Bank. Of the estimated 7 billion people in the world, 1.5 billion live in situations of conflict and fragility. That data puts fragile States at the centre of the new post-2015 agenda. We hold the view that international partners should accommodate the peculiarities and special circumstances of post-conflict nations. The achievement of sustained economic growth and development in those countries is critical to reducing their vulnerability to new political and economic shocks, fuelled in many cases by high expectation gaps that need to be mitigated. We therefore call on all our partners to renew their support to the New Deal for Engagement on Fragile States, which calls for stronger ownership, harmonization, results and mutual accountability.

The President returned to the Chair.

I would like to conclude by expressing our gratitude to the United Nations family for sustaining our agenda of peacebuilding and sustainable development. Since its founding, the United Nations has had its share of challenges, but it remains the beacon of hope for the peoples of the world who thirst for peace; a world that is fair, a world that is prosperous, a world in which the uncommon dreams of all will have a fair chance of realization; a world where the weak can become strong; a world where no nation feels developed and powerful until all nations have their share of global wealth. The leaders of today must rise to those challenges. The future begins today. We must commit to a new global development trajectory that gives all of humankind a world of peace, dignity and prosperity.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Liberia for the statement she has just made.

Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Hassan Rouhani, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Hassan Rouhani, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Hassan Rouhani, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Rouhani (*spoke in Farsi; English text provided by the delgation*): Mr. President, at the outset, I would like to offer my most sincere felicitations on your deserved election as President of the General Assembly and to seize the moment to express appreciation for the valuable efforts of the Secretary-General.

Our world today is replete with fear and hope — fear of war and hostile regional and global relations; fear of deadly confrontation between religious, ethnic and national identities; fear of the institutionalization of violence and extremism; fear of poverty and destructive discrimination; fear of decay and the destruction of life-sustaining resources; fear of the disregard for human dignity and rights; and fear of the neglect of morality. Alongside those fears, however, there are new hopes — the hope of the universal acceptance of "yes to peace and no to war" by the people and the elite all across the globe; and the hope that dialogue will be preferred over conflict and moderation over extremism.

The recent election in Iran represents a clear, living example of the wise choice for hope, rationality and moderation by the great people of Iran. The realization of democracy consistent with religion and the peaceful transfer of executive power showed that Iran is an anchor of stability in an ocean of regional instabilities. The firm belief of our people and Government in enduring peace, stability, tranquillity, the peaceful resolution of disputes and the reliance on the ballot box as the basis of power, public acceptance and legitimacy has indeed played a key role in creating such a safe environment.

The current critical period of transition in international relations is replete with dangers, albeit also with unique opportunities. Any miscalculation of one's own position, and of course those of others, will cause damage on a historic scale; a mistake by one actor will have a negative impact on all others. Vulnerability is now a global and indivisible phenomenon.

At this sensitive juncture in the history of global relations, the age of zero-sum games is over, even though a few actors still tend to rely on archaic and deeply ineffective ways and means of preserving their old superiority and domination. Militarism and the recourse to violent and military means for the purposes

of subjugating others have shown themselves to be failed examples of the perpetuation of old ways in new circumstances.

Coercive economic and military policies and practices geared to the maintenance and preservation of old superiorities and domination have been pursued in a conceptual mindset that negates peace, security, human dignity and exalted human ideals. Ignoring differences between societies and globally imposing Western values as universal values represent further manifestations of that conceptual mindset. Yet another reflection of the same cognitive model is the persistence of the Cold War mentality and the bipolar division of the world into the "superior us" and the "inferior other". Fanning fear and phobia around the emergence of new actors on the world scene is still another.

In such an environment, governmental and non-governmental, religious, ethnic and even racial violence has increased, and there is no guarantee that the era of quiet among major Powers will remain inviolate under the pressure of such violent discourse, practices and actions. The catastrophic impact of violent and extremist narratives should not — in fact, must not — be underestimated.

In that context, the strategic violence that is manifested in efforts to deprive regional players of their natural domain of action, containment policies, regime change from the outside and efforts to redraw political borders and frontiers, is extremely dangerous and provocative. The prevalent international political discourse depicts a civilized centre surrounded by uncivilized peripheries. In that scenario, the relation between the centre of world power and the peripheries is hegemonic.

The discourse that assigns centre stage to the North while relegating the South to the periphery has led to the establishment of a monologue in international relations. The creation of illusory identity distinctions and the current prevalent violent forms of xenophobia are the inevitable outcome of such discourse. Propagandistic and unfounded faith-phobic, Islamophobic, Shiaphobic and Iranophobic discourse indeed represents a serious threat to world peace and human security. That propagandistic discourse has assumed dangerous proportions through the portrayal and inculcation of presumed imaginary threats. One such imaginary threat is the so-called Iranian threat, which has been employed as an excuse to justify a long catalogue of crimes and catastrophic practices over the past three decades. The arming of the Saddam Hussein regime with chemical weapons and support for the Taliban and Al-Qaida are just two examples of such catastrophes. Let me say in all sincerity before this world Assembly that, based on irrefutable evidence, those who harp on the so-called threat of Iran are either a threat against international peace and security themselves or promote such a threat. Iran poses absolutely no threat to the world or to the region. In fact, in its ideals as well as in actual practice, my country has been a harbinger of just peace and comprehensive security.

Nowhere in the world has violence been so deadly and destructive as in North Africa and West Asia. Military intervention in Afghanistan, Saddam Hussein's imposed war against Iran, the occupation of Kuwait, military interventions against Iraq, the brutal repression of the Palestinian people, the assassination of ordinary people and political figures in Iran and terrorist bombings in countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon are examples of the acts of violence committed in that region in the past three decades.

What has been and continues to be practiced against the innocent people of Palestine is nothing less than structural violence. Palestine is under occupation; the basic rights of the Palestinians are being tragically violated, and they are deprived of the right of return and access to their homes, birthplace and homeland. Apartheid as a concept can hardly describe the crimes and the institutionalized aggression committed against the innocent Palestinian people.

The human tragedy in Syria represents a painful example of the catastrophic spread of violence and extremism in our region. From the very outset of the crisis, when certain regional and international actors helped to militarize the situation through the infusion of arms and intelligence into the country and active support for extremist groups, we emphasized that there was no military solution to the Syrian crisis. The pursuit of expansionist strategies and objectives and attempts to change the regional balance through proxies cannot be camouflaged behind humanitarian rhetoric.

The common objective of the international community should be a quick end to the killing of the innocent. While condemning any use of chemical weapons, we welcome Syria's acceptance of the Chemical Weapons Convention and believe that access

by extremist terrorist groups to such weapons poses the greatest possible danger to the region and must be considered in any disarmament plan. Simultaneously, I would underline that any illegitimate and ineffective threat of use, or the actual use of, force will only lead to the further exacerbation of violence and crisis in the region.

Terrorism and the killing of innocent persons represent the ultimate inhumanity of extremism and violence. Terrorism is a violent scourge and knows no national borders. But violence and extreme actions, such as the use of drones, against innocent people in the name of combating terrorism should also be condemned. Here I should also like to say a word about the criminal assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists. For what crimes were they assassinated? The United Nations and its Security Council should answer this question — have the perpetrators been condemned?

Unjust sanctions, as a manifestation of structural violence, are intrinsically inhumane and against peace. Contrary to the claims of those who pursue and impose them, it is not the States and the political elite that are targeted; rather, it is the common people who are victimized by such sanctions. Let us not forget the millions of Iraqis who, as a result of sanctions cloaked in international legal jargon, suffered and lost their lives, and the many more who continue to suffer throughout their lives. Those sanctions are violent, pure and simple, whether called smart or otherwise, unilateral or multilateral. They violate inalienable human rights, inter alia, the right to peace, the right to development, the right to access to health and education, and, above all, the right to life. Sanctions, beyond any and all rhetoric, cause belligerence, warmongering and human suffering. It should be borne in mind, however, that their negative impact is not limited merely to their intended victims; it also affects the economy and livelihood of other countries and societies, including the countries imposing sanctions.

Today violence and extremism have gone beyond the physical realm and, unfortunately, have afflicted and tarnished the mental and spiritual dimensions of life in human societies. Violence and extremism leave no space for understanding and moderation as the necessary foundations of the collective life of human beings and modern society. Intolerance is the predicament of our time. We need to promote and reinforce tolerance in the light of the religious teachings and appropriate cultural and political approaches. Human society should be elevated from a state of mere tolerance to one of collective collaboration. We should not just tolerate others. We should rise above mere tolerance and dare to work together.

People the world over are tired of war, violence and extremism. They are hoping for a change in the status quo. This is a unique opportunity for us all. The Islamic Republic of Iran believes that all challenges can be managed successfully through a smart, judicious blend of hope and moderation. Warmongers are bent on extinguishing all hope. But hope for change for the better is an innate, religious, widespread and universal concept.

Hope is founded on the belief in the universal will of the people across the globe to combat violence and extremism, to cherish change, to oppose imposed structures, to value choice and to act in accordance with human responsibility. Hope is without a doubt one of the greatest gifts bestowed upon human beings by their all-loving Creator. And moderation means to think and move in a wise, judicious manner, conscious of time and space, and to align exalted ideals with a choice of effective strategies and policies, while remaining cognizant of objective realities.

The Iranian people, in a judiciously sober choice in the recent elections, voted for the discourse of hope, foresight and prudent moderation, both at home and abroad. In foreign policy, the combination of those elements means that the Islamic Republic of Iran, as a regional power, will act responsibly with regard to regional and international security and is willing and prepared to cooperate in these fields, bilaterally as well as multilaterally, with other responsible actors. We defend peace based on democracy and the ballot box everywhere, including in Syria, Bahrain and other countries of the region, and believe that there are no violent solutions to world crises. The bitter and ugly realities of human society can be overcome only through recourse to and reliance on human wisdom, interaction and moderation. Peace, democracy and the legitimate rights of all countries in the world, including in the Middle East, cannot and will not be secured through militarism.

Iran seeks to resolve problems, not to create them. There is no issue or dossier that cannot be resolved through reliance on hope, prudent moderation, mutual respect and the rejection of violence and extremism. Iran's nuclear dossier is a case in point. As clearly

stated by the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, acceptance of Iran's inalienable rights constitutes the best and easiest way of resolving this issue. This is not political rhetoric. Rather, it is based on a profound recognition of the state of technology in Iran, the global political environment, the end of the era of zero-sum games and the imperative of seeking common objectives and interests in order to reach common understanding and shared security. Put otherwise, Iran and other actors should pursue two common objectives as two mutually inseparable parts of a political solution for Iran's nuclear dossier.

First, Iran's nuclear programme — and for that matter, that of all other countries — must pursue exclusively peaceful purposes. I declare here, openly and unambiguously, that, notwithstanding others' positions, this has been and always will be the objective of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction have no place in Iran's security and defence doctrine, and contradict our fundamental religious and ethical convictions. Our national interests make it imperative that we remove any and all reasonable concerns about Iran's peaceful nuclear programme.

The second objective — acceptance of and respect for the implementation of the right to enrichment inside Iran and the enjoyment of other related nuclear rights — provides the only path towards achieving the first objective. Nuclear knowledge in Iran has now been domesticated and nuclear technology, including enrichment, has already reached an industrial scale. It is therefore an illusion and extremely unrealistic to presume that the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme could be ensured by impeding the programme via illegitimate pressures.

In this context, the Islamic Republic of Iran, insisting on enjoying its rights and the imperative of international respect and cooperation in this exercise, is prepared to engage immediately in time-bound and results-oriented talks to build mutual confidence and ensure the removal of mutual uncertainties with full transparency.

Iran seeks constructive engagement with other countries based on mutual respect and common interests and, within the same framework, does not seek to increase tensions with the United States. I listened carefully to the statement made by President Obama today in the General Assembly. With efforts commensurate with the political will of the leadership in the United States, and hoping that they will refrain from following the short-sighted interests of warmongering pressure groups, we can arrive at a framework to manage our differences. To this end, equal footing, mutual respect and the recognized principles of international law should govern our interactions. Of course, we expect to hear a consistent message from Washington, D. C.

In recent years, a dominant message has been heard reiterating again and again that the military option is on the table. Against the backdrop of this illegal and ineffective assertion, let me say loud and clear that peace is within reach. So, on behalf of the Islamic Republic of Iran, I propose, as a first step, the consideration by the United Nations of a project to be known as "A World Against Violence and Extremism". Let us all ride this wave. I invite all States, international organizations and civil institutions to undertake a new effort to guide the world in this direction. We should start thinking about a coalition for enduring peace across the entire globe instead of ineffective coalitions for war in various parts of the world.

Today, the Islamic Republic of Iran urges the Assembly and the entire world community to take a step forward by accepting our invitation to join A World Against Violence and Extremism. We should accept and be able to open up new horizons in which peace will prevail over war, tolerance over violence, progress over bloodshed, justice over discrimination, prosperity over poverty and freedom over despotism. As beautifully stated by Ferdowsi, the renowned Iranian epic poet:

> "Be relentless in striving for the cause of good;
> Bring the spring, you must;
> Banish the winter, you should."

Notwithstanding all the difficulties and challenges before us, I am deeply optimistic about the future. I have no doubt that the future will be bright, with the entire world solidly rejecting violence and extremism. Prudent moderation will ensure a bright future for the world. My hope, aside from personal and national experience, emanates from the belief shared by all divine religions that a good and bright future awaits the world. As stated in the Holy Koran:

> "And certainly We wrote in the Book after the reminder that (as for) the land, My righteous servants shall inherit it." (*The Holy Koran, XXI:105*)

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Hassan Rouhani, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Ali Bongo Ondimba, President of the Gabonese Republic

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Gabonese Republic.

Mr. Ali Bongo Ondimba, President of the Gabonese Republic, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Ali Bongo Ondimba, President of the Gabonese Republic, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Bongo Ondimba (*spoke in French*): I am honoured to take the floor on behalf of Gabon at the sixty-eighth session of the Assembly. I warmly congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President and I assure you of Gabon's full support. I also pay tribute to the remarkable work of your predecessor, Mr. Vuk Jeremić, President of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session. I wish to reiterate our confidence in the cross-cutting work of the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, as well as the important organizational reforms undertaken.

I would also like to congratulate Mr. Boubacar Keita of the Republic of Mali and His Excellency Mr. Hassan Rouhani of the Islamic Republic of Iran on their elections in their respective countries.

This session has opened in a context marked by the terrorist attack against a shopping centre in Nairobi that killed many innocent people, including children. It was an intolerable act and I express, here in the Hall, my country's strongest condemnation of the perpetrators. I also express my own and my country's deepest condolences to the victims' families and the people of Kenya. Gabon offers its support to the Government of Kenya at this trying time. As a target of terrorism, Africa should receive the international community's full support and solidarity in its fight against the threat.

Poverty fuels extremism throughout the world, and the fight against that scourge must remain at the heart of our policies. Our peoples, especially the youth, demand greater socioeconomic progress from us. I therefore welcome the opportunity at this session to set the stage for the post-2015 development agenda and consider the necessary action remaining to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs have provided a global solidarity pact for our countries' socioeconomic development. I would like to emphasize here that Gabon has achieved noteworthy progress in poverty reduction, food security and education. We have significantly reduced infant and maternal mortality, HIV/AIDS prevalence and malaria mortality. We have strengthened women's participation in the political and economic life of the country. Despite the efforts made by States, it must be recognized that some of the MDGs will not be achieved as expected, owing mainly to unfulfilled commitments and reduced funding.

In that context, Gabon draws two main conclusions: the importance of strengthened governance and the need for further efforts in education and health aimed at more equitable and inclusive growth. As members begin to consider the post-2015 development agenda, I wish to note that Gabon seeks a post-2015 development agenda with a particular focus on Africa's priorities; it would include the unrealized MDGs among the future sustainable development goals and would take into account specific issues such as energy, access to clean water and sustainable agriculture. My country also seeks an agenda based on predictable funding that combines public and private funding, innovative financing and global partnerships. That agenda should stimulate direct investment and increase our share of international trade. It must promote the transformation of our economies with a view to inclusive and sustainable growth.

Such an approach has led me, as the Chairman of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community, to propose to my peers — who have accepted — the creation of a fund of $200 million for the training and employment of young people, entitled "Train My Generation". Its goal is to enhance the role of youth in our countries' development efforts. In that spirit, at the fifth Tokyo International Conference on African Development, I proposed to my peers that by 2020 Africa should be able to convert its raw materials prior to exportation. Using that approach, Gabon is already

processing 40 per cent of its timber locally, thereby doubling employment in that sector.

In the context of the post-2015 development agenda, improved assessment and monitoring of countries' progress will become important. To that end, Gabon has proposed a sustainable development index that will combine the human development index and countries' ecological footprints.

Our quest for sustainable development must also ensure a binding climate treaty. Our best global experts tirelessly draw attention to global warming. The very existence of some States is threatened. It is necessary to state that we remain prisoners of our own interests and climate sceptics. For its part, Gabon has assumed its responsibilities by implementing measures such as our land-use programme and our environmental programme. Can we advance towards a post-Kyoto agreement in 2015 through strong and courageous steps in the interest of future generations? That question should cause greater concern. That is why I fully support the Secretary-General's initiative to convene a summit on climate change in 2014.

In addition to climate, biodiversity is threatened by poaching and the illicit trade in protected species. Elephants and rhinoceros are especially threatened owing to the illegal trade in ivory and horns. That phenomenon has become both an ecologic and an economic challenge; it is a transnational crime that threatens States' security. Along with the Federal Republic of Germany and other States, we have initiated a debate on that issue. On 26 September, here at the United Nations, an event will take place on the sidelines to mobilize support on the issue. We would be honoured by the presence and participation of members of the Assembly in the discussions. I also call on the United Nations to integrate that issue into its cooperation efforts with the African Union. In May in Marrakech, Morocco, in the presence of the African Development Bank, I proposed the creation of a trust fund aimed at strengthening capacity-building in Africa and other efforts.

Clearly, sustainable development must be based on good governance, equality, access to justice and the protection of human rights and democracy. In Gabon we are striving, with all national stakeholders, to strengthen those areas. We are collecting biometrical data in order to enhance election transparency, thus strengthening democracy. Furthermore, our election to the current Human Rights Council is in line with our commitments, particularly in terms of promoting and protecting the rights of women and children. During this twentieth anniversary year of the Vienna Declaration, Gabon will promote economic, social and cultural rights and seek to combat racism, hatred and violence throughout the world. It is on the basis of those commitments that Gabon will present itself as a candidate for the presidency of the Human Rights Council in 2014.

Africa is more hopeful for its future, but if that hope is to be realized throughout the continent Africa must be able to resolve crises preventing its development. Allow me to list some crisis situations.

First of all, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon is still concerned by fighting in the eastern part of the country, where women and children are paying a high price. We welcome the increased efforts on the part of the United Nations to implement Security Council resolution 2098 (2013) and the commitments made by the parties to the Framework Agreement signed in Addis Ababa. All countries in the Great Lakes region must support efforts by the United Nations. We would also encourage the efforts on the part of the Government to ensure that elections are held soon.

Gabon supports the transition in the Central African Republic, for which we have worked with members of the Economic Community of Central African States. We hope that the numerous stakeholders will adhere strictly to the transition framework. Nevertheless, we are still concerned by the humanitarian and security situation in the country, as well as by the renewed activities on the part of the Lord's Resistence Army. We welcome the establishment of the International Support Mission to the Central African Republic by the African Union, which will take over from the Mission for the Consolidation of Peace in the Central African Republic. Gabon calls for a contingency plan to be put in place for the new mission. I would like to thank France, which is supporting efforts on the part of the subregion to ensure that peace returns to the Central African Republic.

In Mali, at the height of the crisis, Gabon responded to a funding appeal by the African Union, which was launched to support its efforts in that country. We commend the positive political change that has taken place in Mali, proof of which can be seen in the presidential elections and the decision by the people of

Mali to elect President Keita. I would like to wish him all the best, and I call upon the international community to support the reconstruction of Mali.

With regard to Western Sahara, Gabon welcomes efforts to bring about dialogue and negotiations by the Organization. My country would also like to reiterate that it supports the Moroccan initiative for Western Sahara, which we believe is a courageous and realistic proposal, one that could lead to a lasting settlement. We call upon the different players to reach a constructive and dynamic compromise, the results of which will benefit the unity of Africa.

Africa should be able to respond to new threats to peace and security, including transnational crime, the illicit trafficking in small arms, and piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, which the Atlantic coast is now experiencing. Following the Summit of Heads of State and Government on Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea, which was held in June in Yaounde, we adopted a strategy for combating those threats. Gabon is ready to make contributions towards the measures that were adopted at the Summit. I also welcome efforts by the Security Council to address the problem, particularly through resolution 2018 (2011).

Africa cannot face up to the challenges of peace and security alone. Its efforts must be given better support, because instability in Africa will have repurcussions in other regions. I thank our partners, particularly France, Japan, Germany, the United States, the United Nations and the European Union, for their significant contributions towards such efforts.

In the face of those new threats, it is important for the United Nations to continue to enhance its cooperation with regional African organizations. Furthermore, we must ensure the implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty, which was the first legally binding instrument on the matter adopted by the General Assembly, in May.

In a world stricken by tensions and crises, we must continue to work towards ensuring that the Organization can better fulfil its mandate in the area of international peace and security, with a particular emphasis on conflict prevention, while supporting peaceful resolutions to emerging crises. The crisis in Syria has already claimed many lives, and we have seen an unacceptable escalation in the form of the use of chemical weapons. We strongly condemn the use of such weapons, and Gabon calls for the destruction of all stockpiles of chemical weapons throughout the world. With regard to the investigations being carried out by United Nations inspectors in Syria, we call upon all parties to fully cooperate. Furthermore, Gabon supports all diplomatic efforts aimed at achieving a political solution that will allow us to emerge from that crisis. In the event that its efforts are blocked, the Security Council must take measures.

With regard to Palestine and the State of Israel, the possibility of resuming talks with the impetus of the United States must be welcomed. Gabon still supports the broadly accepted view of two viable States, Israel and Palestine, coexisting in mutual security and respect within recognized borders.

With regard to the embargo on Cuba, Gabon reiterates its position in favour of lifting that ban because of its negative impact on the well-being of the Cuban population.

It is our obligation to transform our international institutions in order to make them more equipped to meet current challenges. The reform of the Security Council, enhancing the role and authority of the General Assembly and the reform of the Economic and Social Council are all to be wished. It is essential for our common future that we assume that responsibility, in the spirit of the Charter. Assuring such a future calls upon our shared but differentiated responsibility and forces us to act for the well-being of humankind. On the basis of those convictions, Gabon will continue to be committed, within the Organization, to working for peace and development, which is also at the heart of the vision that I have proposed for the future of my own country, a future I wish for all countries.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly I wish to thank the President of the Gabonese Republic for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Ali Bongo Ondimba, President of the Gabonese Republic, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Željko Komšić, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Željko Komšić was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Željko Komšić, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Komšić (*spoke in Bosnian; English text provided by the delegation*): First of all, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session, as well as members of your team, and to extend to you my full support in your future work.

Plenary meetings of the General Assembly have always been an opportunity for Heads of State to gather and exchange their opinions about the world situation in order to try to find solutions for contemporary global problems.

My country's strategic goal of establishing a formal relationship with and membership in the European Union (EU) is based upon its ambition to become part of the big family of democratic States and therefore assure the full functionality of its own institutions and its further development on the basis of a free market and the rule of law, and especially human rights. Based on the direction and foreign policy activities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, our focus remains on furthering our relationship and institutional relationship with the European Union, according to the Stabilization and Association Agreement and its full implementation. Bosnia and Herzegovina's aspiration to become a member of the European Union is based upon broad political census.

The fact that the process of European integration demands comprehensive political, institutional and legal adjustments in order to reach European standards in all areas is of fundamental importance to my country. We are also fully aware that the active participation of all segments of society of Bosnia and Herzegovina is necessary to expedite the process of European integration. I expect that expediting the remaining activities and the implementation of the *Sejdić-Finci* ruling of the European Court of Human Rights will lead to the fulfilment of the requirements for Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for accession to the European Union.

I also hope for a positive development in the process of fulfilling the conditions for activating the NATO membership action plan and further integrating Bosnia and Herzegovina into NATO security structures. I would also like to emphasize that Bosnia and Herzegovina is in the final phase of negotiations for accession to the World Trade Organization.

Allow me to emphasize again that Bosnia and Herzegovina has a very clear stance with regard to war crimes. All those accused of war crimes will be held responsible for the crimes of which they are accused before either international or domestic courts.

Bosnia and Herzegovina puts great emphasis on regional and subregional cooperation and dialogue among neighbouring countries, whose cultures and traditions have been present in the Balkans for centuries and who are currently at different stages of transition and democratic reform. Bosnia and Herzegovina is turned towards the future and to cooperation with neighbouring countries on the basis of mutual respect, as well as respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. The development of bilateral relations with all of our neighbouring countries and other countries in the region is focused on several key areas: Euro-Atlantic integration, advancing economic cooperation, strengthening regional cooperation and finding constructive solutions for current issues.

Our emphasis on regional cooperation is on the development of communications infrastructure as a basis for better economic, cultural and scientific ties, as well as overall regional development. The potential for regional economic ties is especially strong in the areas of industry, tourism, agriculture and energy.

I would like to especially emphasize our bilateral relations with the Republic of Croatia, which gained a new dimension and dynamic with the Croatian accession to the EU, which was marked by eagerness on both sides to find solutions that are in best interests of both our countries.

I must point out that we continue to live during one of the greatest economic and financial crises in contemporary history, which is certainly the greatest threat to global peace and security. We must do everything in our power to tackle its negative effects and consequences. Although the latest indicators show that some developing countries are coming out of the recession, that is not the case in poor and developing countries, where the consequences of the crisis are very harsh.

The institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina have been strategically working towards achievement of

the Millennium Development Goals. We believe that, despite the difficulties caused by the world economic situation, there will be no obstacles in reaching our stated targets by 2015. Bosnia and Herzegovina has finalized the development strategy for Bosnia and Herzegovina and the social inclusion strategy for Bosnia and Herzegovina, while the strategy for poverty eradication has already been designed and implemented. All of that has been done in cooperation with the relevant United Nations agencies in the country, whom we would like to thank for their close cooperation.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is ready to contribute to global efforts to define a development framework and then to implement it in order to readily face economic, social and environmental challenges. Considering that the importance of the three aspects of sustainable development I have mentioned crosses national borders, Bosnia and Herzegovina believes that regional cooperation is crucial for the successful preparation of the new post-2015 development framework.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as all the other Western Balkan countries at this stage of integration, follows European Union policy and views with regard to the new development agenda. Bosnia and Herzegovina consistently supports the position that sustainable development is possible only in harmony with nature. I am of the opinion that economic and political interests must not be an obstacle to achieving global consensus on a true beginning of the global fight for the preservation of the natural balance of planet Earth. It is often forgotten that climate change has a direct impact on development, poverty and hunger, and consequently on global peace and security. Short-term solutions will have long-term consequences, and the steps we take today will be our legacy for generations to come.

All of us present here agree that the United Nations needs continuous and comprehensive reform, which should be conducted with great caution, assuring a wide consensus of Member States. United Nations reform should provide for efficient and coordinated functioning of all segments and bodies of the system.

It is a widely held belief that Security Council reform is crucial for core reform of the world Organization. That reform, carried out with the consensus of the Member States, is necessary for reasons of efficiency and credibility, and it can be achieved only by taking into account the contemporary geopolitical reality, which differs from that of 1945. Only a Security Council reformed in that way can have full authority and responsibility in addressing the most important issues of international peace and security. That is the mandate entrusted to the Council by the Charter of the United Nations.

Dialogue and compromise are the best way to ensure the widest possible support, and Bosnia and Herzegovina supports the opinion that Security Council reform should be moved from a standstill as soon as possible. We also believe that a reformed Security Council should have an additional seat for a State from the Eastern European Group, as the number of countries in that group has more than doubled in the past two decades.

In accordance with that position, I would also like to emphasize that more engagement in preventative diplomacy is expected from the Security Council. We believe that more activity in the area of preventive diplomacy would help solve many problems and crises before they intensify, which would be a more efficient way for the Council to work. Encouraging dialogue to resolve critical issues by compromise, while acting against any kind of exclusiveness, especially in the area of human rights and human life, is of the utmost importance. Timely and efficient conflict prevention, rather than reaction to a crisis that has already escalated, is definitely a more effective and less costly approach to international peace and security.

We are eager to share with others the positive and the negative of our post-conflict and peacebuilding experience. Bosnia and Herzegovina believes that every crisis should be studied carefully, with careful consideration for the roots of conflict, the culture, religion and local customs and every other factor in order to find a just and long-term solution. There are no universal solutions for any crisis, and each one should be attended to and considered separately.

Bosnia and Herzegovina believes that it is necessary to take concrete steps to prevent nuclear proliferation around the world. In spite of visible obstacles of the past decade, there are new initiatives giving new momentum to the disarmament and non-proliferation process. We believe that nuclear disarmament can be achieved by encouraging Member States parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons to respect their obligations under the Treaty.

Bosnia and Herzegovina will sign the Arms Trade Treaty during the Treaty event.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is gravely concerned about the continuing violence in Syria, which has worsened the humanitarian crisis and caused unacceptable suffering for the Syrian people. We call on all the parties to comply with their obligations under international law and human rights law.

Resolving the crisis in the Middle East continues to be one of the most important priorities of the world Organization. We believe that all possible steps should be taken to create a positive climate in order to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the region. We expect all sides to refrain from any rash actions and to focus on launching this very important dialogue.

In order to play a constructive role in international relations and to contribute to self-sustainable peace and stability, Bosnia and Herzegovina participates in the International Security Assistance Force mission in Afghanistan. In support of international efforts, we also actively participated in the United Nations missions in Liberia, South Sudan and Cyprus.

I would also like to emphasize that Bosnia and Herzegovina remains very concerned that terrorist attacks around the world continue to take the lives of innocent victims. We are committed to fighting terrorism and believe that results in that regard can be achieved only through comprehensive cooperation and a partnership of as many Member States as possible.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is also following the situation on the African continent with great interest. We expect that despite the world financial and economic crisis, most developed countries will continue to increase their contributions to the official development assistence that is essential for capacity-building in poor African countries. Therefore, we welcome the activities of the United Nations through the New Partnership for Africa's Development and other efforts aimed at putting Africa on the road to stable and sustainable development, especially with regard to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. That particularly applies to the countries of sub-Saharan Africa.

We also support all efforts of the African Union, African Governments and the United Nations to improve the rule of law and democracy and to strengthen civil society and its institutions, in order to improve all aspects of society. We wish to point out that continued and greater financial aid to Africa is just as important as improving the efficiency and transparency of the use of aid funds for sustainable development.

In today's world, with political and social processes more dynamic than ever, we face challenges quite different from those of only a few decades ago. It is becoming clear that only a strong multilateral approach can produce good solutions. In its more than six decades of existence, the United Nations has seen many trials and tribulations, but it has always been, and continues to be, the only guide to a better future. It is still the only organization capable of providing solutions to the global problems we face.

It is up to us to make it stronger and more efficient, for only the United Nations — the most comprehensive and inclusive organization — can help bring progress and well-being to our planet. If we work together to implement all our agreements reached in this hallowed place, there is no doubt that we will live in better and more just conditions than exist today. On that path, we need to return to the basic values and principles of human rights, equality and world peace that are the foundation of the United Nations.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Željko Komšić, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by General Michel Sleiman, President of the Lebanese Republic

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Lebanese Republic.

General Michel Sleiman, President of the Lebanese Republic, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency General Michel Sleiman, President of the Lebanese Republic, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Sleiman (*spoke in Arabic*): I would first like to warmly congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its current session, and to express my full appreciation to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, who has closely followed developments in the situation in Lebanon.

I particularly wish to point out the presidential statement issued by the Security Council on 10 July (S/PRST/2013/9), which provides an effective road map for what the international community can do to help Lebanon in order to preserve its stability, promote its institutions, support its economy and army and to help it face the growing burden created by the refugees entering from Syria. That is definitely the core objective of the meeting of the International Support Group for Lebanon, which will be launched tomorrow afternoon, 25 September.

Many countries represented here have witnessed uprisings, civil wars or foreign aggression. Lebanon, too, has experienced many wars, which have led to influxes of numerous refugees in our territory. Against all odds, the Lebanese have sought to assume the responsibility for restoring the glory of our country as a space for freedom and coexistence and to hallow their presence in the East within the confines of a State that embraced democracy from its very inception while ensuring respect for diversity within unity as well as personal and public freedoms.

Through dialogue, the Lebanese will continue to develop their political system and improve their democratic practices. They will have to remain committed to the Baabda Declaration, which advocates Lebanon distancing itself from regional crises and axis politics. It is equally essential to reach an agreement on a national strategy to ensure the exclusive defence of Lebanon in the face of Israel's hostility and ongoing threats.

Nevertheless, however strong the Lebanese commitment may be, we still require the care and support of brotherly and friendly countries in order to address the repercussions of external conflicts and crises that threaten our security and stability and have negative impacts on our socioeconomic situation. The Lebanese look to assistance not only in the name of brotherly solidarity and the shared responsibility of the international community as a whole, but also in the face of events that pose a threat to regional and international security.

The first challenge is rooted in the repercussions of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon's security and economy. An existential challenge has arisen, related to the growing number of Syrian refugees on Lebanese territory, which is far beyond Lebanon's capacity to assimilate them. The number of refugees has already exceeded one quarter of the Lebanese population. As the Assembly knows, Lebanon is a country of limited geographical area and resources, as well as sensitive balances.

Therefore, while we understand that it is not possible to impose the impossible on nations, it is important for me to reiterate my call on the States Members of the United Nations to provide sufficient human and financial resources to manage the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and meet their humanitarian and essential needs, bearing in mind that the pledges undertaken at the meeting of donor States hosted by the State of Kuwait on 30 January have only been partially fulfilled; to expand infrastructure and reception areas for Syrian refugees within Syrian territories themselves and organize an international conference on the issue of Syrian refugees, with the aim of sharing the burden among different countries in accordance with the principle of shared responsibility while also assisting the International Support Group for Lebanon; and to garner support from all concerned States for the work of the International Support Group. Of course, all of that must take place while we work towards finding a political solution for the Syrian crisis that will preserve the unity of Syria.

Lebanon has called attention to the need to bring to justice the perpetrators of the crimes that have been committed. Solutions must be found to ensure that the conflict does not spread to neighbouring countries. Today, we have an opportunity to condemn all terrorist attacks perpetrated anywhere in the world, particularly in the Middle East.

I would like to comment on the attack that took place upon the historic town of Maaloula. That attack represents an assault on civilization and the tolerant spirit of religions. That is why the international community must adopt a firm stance in order to protect such sites, in particular through the adoption of an investigative mechanism that will assess the reality of the situation on the ground.

We must work to encourage the countries of the region currently engaged in conflict to ensure that the logic of dialogue and negotiation prevails and to keep Lebanon from getting involved in the Syrian conflict, while encouraging those countries to contribute the necessary assistance and support for the Baabda Declaration, just as the Security Council has pledged its support.

However, the main challenge that we face remains the Arab-Israeli conflict and Israeli settlement policy practices, not to overlook the difficulties created by it in terms of refugee flows. The settlement policy has fostered a sense of frustration and a tendency towards extremism. Lebanon has been affected by the daily Israeli attacks against Lebanon and its infrastructure through the use of all sorts of prohibited weapons. Lebanon has paid a high price for those acts of aggression, with all that implies in terms of the burden on human lives and destruction. It therefore falls upon the international community to work to find a fair and comprehensive solution to the conflict in the Middle East, particularly with respect to the Palestinian cause, pursuant to the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference and the Arab Peace Initiative. Stability, democracy and moderation will not prevail in the Middle East unless justice is done in Palestine, based on the belief that the security of the Arab region and the preservation of its cultural diversity are of strategic importance.

Lebanon calls for the adoption of an integrated comprehensive approach that includes the participation of all States concerned and addresses all aspects of the Israeli-Arab conflict. At the same time, no solution should be taken at the expense of its superior interests. As a result, Lebanon will reject any compromise attempting to force an influx of Palestinian refugees on its territory.

In this transitional period where the Arab world is undergoing major historic upheaval and deep-wrought changes, the world as a whole is witnessing an fundamentl structural transformation due to the amazing scientific progress that has been achieved, in particular in the fields of communication and information. That progress will contribute to globalization in all aspects of life. We must therefore convey a spirit of pluralism and diversity within all societies as a necessary condition in order to match the accelerating pace of change.

However, the regimes that run the affairs of peoples and societies have unfortunately not undergone a corresponding evolution at the intellectual level. On the contrary, we have witnessed conflicts exacerbated by extremist terrorism continue to spring forth fuelled by isolationism that rejects dialogue, mutual recognition and coexistence. That has even led some to call for the return to religious emirates and racial segregation. In order to do so, those groups have applied violent methods that flout peace and public freedoms.

Amid those unilateral fundamentalist tendencies, Lebanon remains a laboratory and a model of necessary coexistence for the future. That model must be allowed to benefit from support and stability because, as it has for decades, it has led to the education of students in our schools and universities and caused the security forces to fulfil their national missions in military camps in a spirit of unity. It is a model that is also experienced by the citizens on a daily basis on the streets of our cities, towns and in our capital, in the theatres, clubs, at the movies, in public and private institutions and in civil society organizations. The model, which has become a lifestyle, is lived with the sound of the church bells and the voices of the mosques' muezzins ringing in our ears, in particular at joint celebrations, the most significant of which is the Common Religious National Day, celebrated on the day of the Annunciation on 25 March of every year, when everyone is urged to seek the common good.

The management of diversity and the building of a culture of justice, peace and coexistence between cultures, civilizations and religions requires that we all make efforts at the following three levels.

First, we must work to improve the political, financial and social systems that govern the affairs of peoples worldwide, in particular the democratic system, to make them more humane and better suited to diversity. This must be done in such a way so as to guarantee the involvement of all components of society, in particular minorities, in political life and in the management of public affairs in all States, regardless of what ratio of the population such minorities may represent, but, rather, on the basis of their capacity and heritage.

Secondly, we must consider the preservation of an active presence on the part of minorities worldwide, with all the civilizations and specific characteristics that they represent, to be an international responsibility, especially in the Middle East. The Middle East is the cradle of the monotheistic religions, whose peoples have coexisted for centuries, forged civilizations and enriched the history of humankind through their culture and the values of tolerance, goodwill and friendship. That shared responsibility cannot be based on international interests in that part of the world while ignoring the communities living there. Rather, it should take into account the interests of all of those minorities and their right to participate in all aspects of the life of their nation, as they are an integral part of its fabric.

Thirdly, there is a need to intensify ongoing efforts aimed at reforming and developing the United Nations and its specialized agencies, so as to bring them into line with current realities and restore confidence in their capacity to resolve international issues, counter crime and adopt the appropriate resolutions and implement them without obstruction, free from selectivity and the policy of double standards. That would be an alternative to the logic of legitimate force that may be used by peoples whose countries have fallen victim to aggression and occupation, in the absence of a capable, guaranteed international mechanism.

For its part, Lebanon will remain faithful to the message of freedom and coexistence that are its hallmark, reiterating its commitment to implementing all decisions of international legitimacy and to upholding the spirit of moderation and agreement upon which Lebanon was founded. It will also remain an active partner in the context of the promotion of a culture of justice, peace and sustainable human development.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Lebanese Republic for the statement he has just made.

General Michel Sleiman, President of the Lebanese Republic, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the general debate for this meeting.

The meeting rose at 6.25 p.m.